

Strengthened community resilience and COVID-19 response through community action interventions

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE WHO EUROPEAN HEALTHY CITIES NETWORK

Meeting report – extraordinary online meeting of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and national network coordinators

Thursday, 19 March 2020 11:00-12:15 CET

Online via WebEx



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CONTEXT

On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of WHO declared the current global COVID-19 outbreak to be a pandemic.

This decision was based on two factors: the speed and scale of transmission and concerns that not all countries are addressing the outbreak with the level of political commitment needed to control it. The full speech is available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>.

On Thursday 19 March 2020, an extraordinary meeting of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and national network coordinators was convened to assess the needs of cities in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was part of an ongoing needs assessment being undertaken by the Community Action Interventions (CAI) COVID-19 Response Team to identify and understand the specific needs of relevant partners and actors so that they can strengthen community reliance and response efforts through community action. The needs assessment will allow the WHO Regional Office for Europe to subsequently align its technical support and guidance to support these efforts.

Cities are severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and are key actors in an effective response. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network is a platform through which the WHO Regional Office for Europe can directly engage with and support city response efforts across the WHO European Region.

The meeting brought together cities in the European Network and national networks from 24 countries as well as representatives of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and WHO headquarters.=

PURPOSE

The meeting was held to discuss and identify both the challenges faced by and the specific needs of cities across the WHO European Healthy Cities Network in the context of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY AREAS

Notified priority areas from the meeting included:

- mental health;
- groups at high risk of vulnerability – especially older people and children;
- homelessness support and providing shelters; and
- WHO and UNESCO to partner on sharing resources and linking the two networks to support the COVID-19 response.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS REQUESTED OF WHO

The following actions were requested of WHO from national healthy cities networks and cities:

Advocacy and communication

- Strengthening the knowledge and understanding of ministers and ministries of Health that WHO European national healthy cities networks are partners and resources for supporting national response efforts
- Developing communication and messaging targeting the local and city levels directly – especially infographics and communication aimed at the local level
- Information targeting the private sector and chambers of trade and commerce

Knowledge and good practice

- Collating and sharing examples on good practices of cities responding to COVID-19, including on how to tackle and address the public health problems that will emerge locally
- Regular meetings of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network to allow cities to share how the situation is evolving
- The WHO European Healthy Cities Network to partner with UNESCO learning cities to share global learning and experiences
- Sharing good practices in the COVID-19 response from other WHO regions globally
- Creating an online platform for cities to share documents, guidance and good practice examples among themselves

Technical support

- Technical guidance on:
 - How municipalities can disinfect public spaces
 - How the general public can use masks
 - How to behave in daily situations
 - Loneliness
 - The mental health impact of social distancing measures
 - How to collect and present data to citizens



**SUMMARIES
BY COUNTRY**

Austria

City of Vienna

The City of Vienna stated that the main concern in Austria and Vienna are the economic effects, especially the loss of jobs. The government has established funding support very rapidly to attempt to alleviate the consequences of this, including for short-term and temporary workers.

Vienna is almost completely shut down, and only shops deemed necessary for daily needs (food, pharmacies etc.) are open. Schools and universities are closed and switched to distance learning. Public transport still functions. People are allowed to go out to get supplies, to help others and to pursue important work. The information policy of the federal government is effective, and the measures were implemented step by step so that people could adapt.

Ski resorts were identified as hot-spots for transmitting the virus, but social distancing measures were implemented too late to limit the spread in these settings. Ski resorts are now closed, and several communities, including the whole province of Tyrol, are under quarantine measures.

Belgium

City of Brussels

The City of Brussels informed that cities in Belgium are organizing support for people in need. Volunteers who want to help and people who need help can register on municipal websites to find each other, including in Brussels.

In Belgium, the measures started on Friday, 13 March. The intention is to slow down the number of infections so that the health system can continue to care for everyone who is severely ill. The measures include: everybody is urged to stay indoors; everybody who can should work from home; all gatherings of people are forbidden; and bars, restaurants and non-essential shops are closed. People are permitted to go out but should practice social distancing. The people you may interact with are limited to your own household and maximum one other person for the duration of the crisis. These measures are in place until 6 April, with potential for extension.

Croatia

City of Rijeka

The City of Rijeka informs that, in Croatia, all non-essential shops and services are closed, all events are cancelled, people are advised to stay indoors and work from home if they can and social distancing is advised. Many smaller businesses already have to cancel employee contracts with immediate effect, and the economic effects are a considerable concern across the country.

The national government has presented measures to help counter this, but the effectiveness and success of these measures has yet to be determined, especially for small and medium-sized businesses. The City of Rijeka (and most other local governments) have organized to provide delivery services to those in isolation and the groups at high risk. Mental health is a priority area, and emergency phone lines for people in crisis have been set up.

To date, Croatia has 102 confirmed cases with 1 confirmed death. The City of Rijeka has 14 confirmed cases to date.

Czech Republic

Czech Healthy Cities Network

The Czech Healthy Cities Network is connecting all its member cities and providing advice on how to act from a public health perspective as well as giving legal advice to members free of charge regarding cities as well as the public and small businesses. Cities are sharing their good practices in response to COVID-19 via the online Czech Healthy Cities Network platform. The situation is changing every day and very rapidly across the country. The Network facilitates the exchange of good practices between cities through the mailing group and online social media platforms, and together with partners is offering services for free for cities in the areas of legislation, legal support, smart electronic communication and crisis management.

The Network thanked WHO for its coordination and support.

WHO support was requested to maintain regular sharing of information and providing information and guidance on mental health in particular. Further, the exchange of good practice examples from other countries regarding the concrete work and support provided for cities was requested.

Denmark

Danish Healthy Cities Network

The Danish Healthy Cities Network informed that, in Denmark, many students of medicine and other health professions as well as retired health workers are supporting the response across all regions in Denmark. Most people seem to be respecting the social distancing measures put in place, but many young people still meet in groups. This is thought to be because they have difficulty in understanding why they are not able to meet, since they do not feel at risk.

Finland

Finnish Healthy Cities Network

City of Helsinki

The City of Helsinki commented that it has started working with a COVID-19 crisis group, led by the mayor.

The Finnish Healthy Cities Network informed that it is organizing an online meeting for its members to discuss and share ideas on how cities and municipalities can support the residents with various needs. The meeting is intended for peer support purposes and to discuss the role of health and well-being promotion in this situation.

A link was shared with further information: <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/helsinki-prepares-for-coronavirus-in-many-ways>

WHO support was requested to share good examples of how to collect and present data on a daily basis to inform citizens further.

France

City of Nice

The City of Nice informed that, across France, including in Nice, people are under social distancing measures. These measures include: people must walk alone and keep physical distance. This has led to almost a complete shutdown of the economy. To leave the house, people must present a signed paper to state that it is only for buying essential food and medicines. The measures are enforced through fines.

For older people and low-income groups, the city of Nice has organized food supplies, but this will be hard to sustain if this situation lasts for several weeks.

WHO support was requested for guidance on the use of masks by the general population, since there seems to be confusion regarding the messaging in France.

Germany

German Healthy Cities Network

The German Healthy Cities Network informed that local food banks are closed, but volunteers are shopping for the people under quarantine. The federal government is urging the population to adhere to the recommended social isolation guidance. The measures will be reviewed in accordance with the developing scenario and revised accordingly.

Across the country, all mutual and self-help centres are closed, and people cannot go to their weekly meetings – there is concern regarding the public health impact of this.

An English-language website was shared from the Robert Koch Institute with further information: https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html

WHO support was requested to share good examples on how to tackle and address the problems that will emerge locally, including isolation.

Greece

Hellenic Healthy Cities Network

The Hellenic Healthy Cities Network requested specific information from WHO targeting the local level.

WHO support was requested to provide information directly targeting the local level. One suggestion was to create a virtual platform with information for both cities and citizens, including a platform where good practice can be shared with other cities. This was deemed to be especially relevant considering that many cities experience the same problems but are offering different solutions, and hence sharing these measures is important.

Iceland

City of Reykjavik

The City of Reykjavik informed that Iceland has implemented a ban for social gatherings and asked people to work from home. Playschools are still open, albeit with restrictions, and service delivery is being organized by forming small groups. High schools and universities are closed, and hospitals and homes for older people are closed for visits.

Mass testing has been conducted nationwide, with an indicated 1% infection rate. It is expected that this will probably change, but current information on the mass testing in Iceland is available in English at: <https://www.government.is/news/article/2020/03/15/Large-scale-testing-of-general-population-in-Iceland-underway>.

The City of Reykjavik informed that Iceland now has a website with information and available in English: <https://www.covid.is/english>. The specific section on data is updated daily and available at: <https://www.covid.is/data>.

Ireland

Irish Healthy Cities Network

The Irish Healthy Cities Network is promoting WHO as a key source of information through both the national network and other national sources of information.

A request was made to WHO to identify to health ministers and ministries that European national healthy cities networks are able to support national responses.

Israel

Israel Healthy Cities Network

The Israel Healthy Cities Network suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic be used as an opportunity to support networks and cities to acknowledge the city coordinators and the national networks.

Support was requested from WHO to take action in identifying the members of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and European national healthy cities networks as partners in national response efforts to health ministries in all countries.

Italy

Italian Healthy Cities Network

City of Udine

Both the Italian Healthy Cities Network and the City of Udine informed about the dramatic situation in Italy, including severe restrictions on public activities and the dramatic impact it has on people's daily lives.

Both parties noted that risk perception is crucial, including raising people's awareness across the European Region of the potential severity of the situation, using Italy as an example. This is crucial because other countries face the risks that have not yet reached the level of the situation of Italy.

It was noted that WHO plays a significant role in the COVID-19 response situation because it is transversal to all countries and can support political decisions taken at the country level.

Both parties thanked WHO for their support and indicated that they were happy to share further information both with WHO and other members of the Network. It was noted that there is a lot of material circulating online, but having infographics with the WHO logo would give it more authority and trust.

WHO support was requested to the WHO European Healthy Cities Network on the following points:

- streamlined guidelines for local and regional governments on the use of masks and other public health measures on how to behave in daily situations;
- guidance on mental health and social distancing to fight the fear of loneliness (the City of Udine is developing a project on methods for virtual meetings to tackle this issue);
- technical support adapted to political and community messages;
- infographics and communication aimed at the local level;
- guidance specifically on fragile groups; and
- an online platform for cities to share documents, guidance and good practice examples among themselves.

Latvia

City of Riga

The City of Riga informed about 86 cases in total in Latvia. The schools and universities across the country are closed, and from the week of 23 March, the country will start distance learning. Theatres and cinemas across the country are closed until 14 April, with potential for extension. Retirement homes and hospitals, including maternity hospitals, are not open to visitors. Transit tickets are not sold on public transport, and no boarding is allowed at the front door to protect drivers from infection.

Supermarkets have set the time from 8:00 to 10:00 aside especially for older people, families with children and pregnant women.

It was noted that the situation is also escalating in neighbouring Estonia.

Lithuania

City of Kaunas

The City of Kaunas informed that Lithuania is doing as much as it can to deal with this crisis. Total quarantine measures have been in place since March 16, and there is a specific number citizens can call for advice.

The city informed that the Ministry of Health has established 10 mobile points for citizens to be tested for COVID-19.

Netherlands

City of Utrecht

The City of Utrecht informed that, as soon as the restaurants were told to close, food was delivered to the local food banks across the country. There are many volunteers across the country to support people in quarantine and vulnerable or older people. Schools are organizing online classes, including music classes and yoga classes.

In the City of Utrecht, the team on vulnerable groups (homeless people, people who use drugs and people who are addicted to drugs) are working intensely to provide health services and shelters. A key public health risk that has been identified in the Netherlands is that parents are not bringing children for the "normal" vaccinations anymore due to concern that their (young) children may be infected at the health facilities. There is a concern that decreasing vaccination rates might be an overall consequence.

WHO was thanked for its support and coordination, and interest was expressed in continuing to share approaches, questions and lessons learned.

Norway

Norwegian Healthy Cities Network

The Norwegian Healthy Cities Network informed that it is focusing on promoting the information from WHO and from the national institutes. They are also concentrating on mental health issues and are conscious about spreading messages that can inspire hope. Norway is in lockdown, and they are concerned about the mental health effects on children, adolescents and adults. Non-essential Network activities have been cancelled due to the situation, allowing them to divert resources to supporting members.

Portugal

Portuguese Healthy Cities Network

The Portuguese Healthy Cities Network informed that all cities in Portugal have developed their own contingency plans, and their community support network is providing care for older people and delivering meals to isolated older people. A key issue in the country is the lack of personal protective and other equipment such as masks and ventilators.

It was noted that the General Directorate of Health has a specific website for keeping people updated on the data in Portugal. Measures taken also include making much public transport free of charge with no ticket purchase required and mandatory entry from the rear door to protect the driver. All cities are disinfecting public spaces daily. At the time of the meeting, shops, coffee shops and restaurants had not yet all been closed, but the government is reassessing the situation daily.

To implement these measures the country has declared a state of emergency, which is the first time that this has occurred under this constitution.

It was noted that it was very useful for the Network to see all the measures cities and networks have taken, and WHO support was requested to collect and share good practices throughout the Network.

Russian Federation

Russian Healthy Cities Network

The Russian Healthy Cities Network informed that the situation in the Russian Federation with respect to COVID-19 is under control. Regions are taking various measures, including implementing distance learning for schoolchildren and students, cancelling mass events and providing targeted assistance to older people and vulnerable groups.

Slovenia

Slovenian Healthy Cities Network

The Slovenian Healthy Cities Network informed that the country has closed all schools and all shops except for food shops. Increasingly, companies are closing their production. As of March 18, the country has banned the movement of people in public areas for more than five people. All companies that can provide work from home have workers working from home. There is also a ban on public transport.

The country is identifying the procurement of further personal protective equipment, especially protective masks.

It was informed that as of the date of the meeting, Slovenia had performed 8730 SARS-CoV-2 tests and had 286 confirmed infections.

Spain

Spanish Healthy Cities Network

The Spanish Healthy Cities Network informed that the situation in Spain is quite difficult, and in epidemiological terms, the country is following Italy very closely. A difference between the two countries is that Spain had tested less than Italy.

There is consensus that measures have been adopted late, and initially there was a lot of confusion with the information provided to citizens. A particular challenge was to convince people that COVID-19 is more serious than common influenza.

The country is now organizing well and implementing measures, but many people are still moving to their jobs, and there are a lot of people together in public transport, sharing spaces. The situation in the capital, Madrid, is of particular concern, and hospitals are almost full. One key issue identified was with older people in nursing homes.

It was noted that all countries need access to credible information, and there should be coordinated measures put in place where possible (for example, across the European Union). Mental health was identified as being the most important public health consideration in the short term.

United Kingdom

City of Belfast

City of Carlisle

The City of Belfast noted that a key group is children at risk, who will potentially be at home every day, and low-income families who depend on free school meals across the United Kingdom.

Appreciation to WHO was expressed for their support, and further support was requested on increased information for the private sector and chambers of trade and commerce. It was noted that examples of good practice from other WHO regions would also be valuable.

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

Vanessa Pogacnik Murillo was representing the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

Information was shared from the UNESCO Network, which has 173 city members. All WHO European Healthy Cities Network members were invited to join the UNESCO Learning Cities Respond to COVID-19 Webinar on 19 March from 13:00 to 14:00 as well as on March 25. Cities around the world will share recent experience of respond by the education sector to COVID-19.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Austria

City of Vienna

Belgium

City of Brussels

Croatia

City of Rijeka

Cyprus

Cypriot Healthy Cities Network

Czech Republic

Czech Healthy Cities Network

Denmark

Danish Healthy Cities Network

Finland

Finnish Healthy Cities Network

City of Helsinki

France

City of Nice

Germany

German Healthy Cities Network

Greece

Hellenic Healthy Cities Network

Iceland

City of Reykjavik

Ireland

Irish Healthy Cities Network

City of Cork

Israel

Israel Healthy Cities Network

Italy

City of Udine

Italian Healthy Cities Network

Latvia

City of Riga

Lithuania

City of Kaunas

Netherlands

City of Utrecht

Norway

Norwegian Healthy Cities Network

Portugal

Portuguese Healthy Cities Network

Russian Federation

Russian Healthy Cities Network

Slovenia

Slovenian Healthy Cities Network

Spain

Spanish Healthy Cities Network

Turkey

Turkish Healthy Cities Network

United Kingdom

City of Belfast

City of Carlisle

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities

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Global Network of Learning Cities

WHO Regional Office for Europe

Elisabeth Bengtsson, Consultant, WHO

European Healthy Cities Network

Hanna Dunning, Consultant, WHO

European Healthy Cities Network

Monika Kosinska, Regional Focal Point,

WHO European Healthy Cities Network

Leonardo Palumbo, Consultant,

Governance for Health

Adam Tiliouine, Technical Officer,

Governance for Health

WHO headquarters

Faten Ben Abdelaziz, Coordinator,

Enhanced Wellbeing

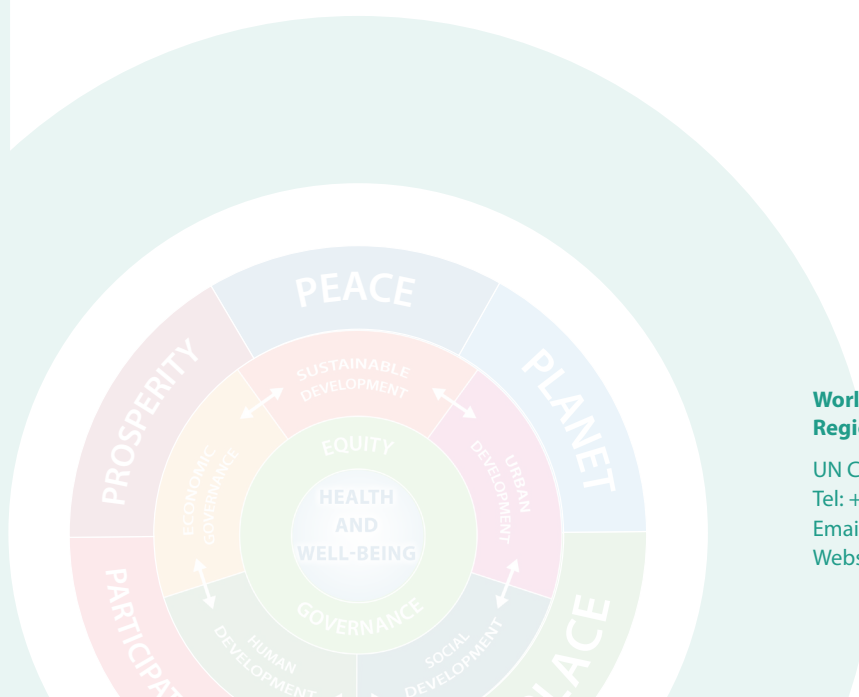


The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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Member States

Albania	Lithuania
Andorra	Luxembourg
Armenia	Malta
Austria	Monaco
Azerbaijan	Montenegro
Belarus	Netherlands
Belgium	North Macedonia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Norway
Bulgaria	Poland
Croatia	Portugal
Cyprus	Republic of Moldova
Czechia	Romania
Denmark	Russian Federation
Estonia	San Marino
Finland	Serbia
France	Slovakia
Georgia	Slovenia
Germany	Spain
Greece	Sweden
Hungary	Switzerland
Iceland	Tajikistan
Ireland	Turkey
Israel	Turkmenistan
Italy	Ukraine
Kazakhstan	United Kingdom
Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
Latvia	



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